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SUBJECT: COUNCIL ADOPTS STATEMENT REGRETTING LITTLE
PROGRESS IN BURMA

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USUN NEW Y 00000058 001.2 OF 002

Summary

1. (SBU) After a heated Security Council debate January 17 on the question of whether Burma had responded to the demands of the international community, Council members adopted a press statement reiterating support for UN Special Advisor Gambari, including a call for his early return to Burma, reaffirming support for the October 11 UNSC Presidential Statement objectives, and regretting the "slow rate of progress." Gambari delivered a forceful message to the Council, urging members to make concrete their rhetorical claims of support for the good offices mission by engaging "individually and collectively" with the Burmese. He said that both he and the Secretary-General agreed that the Burmese invitation for Gambari to return in mid-April was not acceptable, and later repeated that point to the press. China reiterated its longstanding opposition to Council action on Burma, and insisted the seven step roadmap is the only realistic basis for moving Burma along the path of democracy. Vietnam echoed this position, and both delegations called for an "oriental" solution, which they described as characterized by patience. South African PR Kumalo aggressively questioned the purpose of the consultations and the value of a press statement. Indonesia, along with new members of the Council (Burkina Faso, Costa Rica, and Croatia), joined the P-3 and other like-minded countries in calling for Gambari's early return to Burma, for progress on dialogue and national reconciliation, and for a unified statement of Council support. Russia and Panama asserted the Council's credibility would suffer by focusing on Burma while remaining silent on the situation in the Middle East. Highlighting the gap between the objectives set out in the October 11 PRST and Burmese inaction, Ambassador Khalilzad challenged the Council to send a signal that the international community is paying attention and there will be consequences.

Gambari briefs the Council

2. (SBU) UN Special Advisor Gambari delivered a forceful briefing to the Council during consultations on January 17. He said that key issues had not been addressed despite initial indications that the Burmese authorities were willing to work with the UN. Aung Sun Suu Kyi remains under house arrest and the Burmese have not relaxed the conditions of her detention. The regime has made no effort to establish a meaningful, time-bound dialogue; has not taken measures to broaden the National Constitutional Drafting Committee; and

has yet to respond to requests to establish a Poverty Alleviation Commission. Gambari made clear that the Secretary-General expected him to return to Burma as soon as

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possible and that both agreed that the Burmese invitation for Gambari to return in mid-April was not acceptable. He asked that rhetorical support from the Council, from ASEAN, and from the international community be translated into concrete action, such as signaling to the Burmese that frequent, meaningful, and substantive visits to Burma are an integral part of his mission. In response to prompting by Ambassador Khalilzad, Gambari added that a strong statement of support showing Security Council unity would be helpful.

United States and Like-Minded Countries

13. (SBU) Ambassador Khalilzad challenged the Council, arguing that any "fair-minded assessment" would conclude that the Burmese authorities had not responded to the objectives set out in the UNSC October 11 Presidential Statement. He argued the Council needed to signal to the Burmese that it is serious, including demonstrating support for Gambari, who is "the face of the UN" in Burma. Gambari must return to Burma as soon as possible -- this month, he added -- to carry out his mission. Just ignoring the situation will not be as effective as firm resolve. The Burmese must understand that the Council is paying attention and there will be consequences for inaction. UK PR Sawers and French PR Ripert echoed Ambassador Khalilzad's remarks. UK PR Sawers added that economic initiatives are acceptable only after there is a clear indication of progress. If the regime fails to take additional steps, however, the Security Council will have to consider additional steps, Sawers said. Ripert made a similar linkage. Belgian PR Verbeke called for concrete results and a timeline to "make the process credible." Italian PR Spatafora said that the Burmese authorities needed to respond to the UN's requests and warned that the Council's attention "would not weaken."

USUN NEW Y 00000058 002.2 OF 002

14. (SBU) Indonesian PR Natalegawa said that after listening to Council members' positions, including China, he noted, he supported a Council statement of united support for Gambari and encourage sustained engagement by the Council in Burma. He commented that during the December ASEAN Summit, the Burmese regime committed to cooperation with the UN and its good offices mission. In so doing, the regime also committed to UN efforts to engage in a dialogue and national reconciliation, he reasoned. He said that Security Council efforts were "synergistic" with Gambari and the good offices mission and added that it was important for the Security Council to stay informed on Burma. PR Natalegawa stated that the Council's vision was made clear in the October 11 Presidential Statement and hoped that Burma could attain that vision. New Council members Burkina Faso, Croatia, and Costa Rica also offered broadly supportive statements

China, Vietnam Oppose

15. (SBU) Chinese Political Minister Counselor Li Junhua said that he was "only speaking on instructions received from his capital" and proceeded with a strongly worded statement reiterating China's objection to Security Council action in Burma and its position that the Burma's future "lies in the hands of its people." Li also insisted that the regime's seven-step roadmap is the only feasible way forward in Burma and international efforts to support Burma on the path to democracy should reflect this. He claimed that interrupting the roadmap process was not realistic and could "give rise to further domestic clashes." Li called for ASEAN to play a greater role and expressed hope that Gambari could return at an early date. Vietnamese PR Minh echoed China's position,

cautioning that the Burmese required engagement, not isolation. He recommended that the UN focus on poverty as "the cause of many problems." Both delegations suggested the need for an "oriental" approach, which they described as characterized by patience. The French and Belgian PermReps challenged their view that implementation of the seven-step roadmap, which is not inclusive, will be helpful.

Other Negative Voices

16. (SBU) Russian DPR Dolgov also expressed general agreement with the Chinese position. He offered support for Gambari and his good offices mission and reminded the Council that Gambari's mission was mandated by the General Assembly. DPR Dolgov added, however, that April was not soon enough for Gambari's next visit and that he hoped the "technical issues" keeping him from Burma could be resolved. Dolgov commented -- and asked that Gambari pass to the Burmese -- that progress thus far was not adequate. Russia looks forward to further progress in Burma, he said, and the Council should assess the situation after Gambari's next visit to Burma. Both DPR Dolgov and Panamanian PR Arias said the Security Council would suffer credibility by focusing on Burma while remaining silent on high priority issues, such as the Middle East. South African PR Kumalo questioned the utility of the consultations and the efficacy of a press statement. Beyond facilitating the discussion, the Libyan PR Ettalhi did not speak on the issue.

Press Statement

17. (SBU) Following the exchange of views among delegations, Amb Khalilzad prompted Gambari for his views. The Special Advisor made clear that delays in granting him a visa were unacceptable, and underscored the utility for a strong and unified signal from the Council. He said his goal for his next visit is to meet ASSK and raise the level of her contact with the government. The Council then adopted the following press statement: "Council members discussed the situation in Myanmar on 17 January with the Secretary-General's Special Adviser, Ibrahim Gambari. They reiterated their full support for his efforts. Council members affirmed their support for the objectives set out in the Council's presidential statement of 11 October 2007. They regretted the slow rate of progress so far towards meeting those objectives. Council members underscored the importance of further progress, noting that an early visit by Myanmar by Mr. Gambari could help facilitate this. They looked forward to continuing contacts with the special envoy and will remain seized of the matter."
KHALILZAD